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THE CRAYON.

NEW YORK, DECEMBER 12, 1855.

THE Editors of THE CRAYON would not have it understood that they endorse the extracts they make from books or papers in all cases. The opinions of men are often given as matter of interest, although THE CRAYON might dissent entirely from them.

In order to distinguish between the communications by artists and those non-artistic, the former will, hereafter, in all cases, be signed in black letter, the latter, as usual, in Roman capitals.

Mrs. M. A. DENNISON is authorized to obtain subscribers for THE CRAYON.

Sketchings.

ARCHITECTURAL DECORATIONS.

IN no age since the Augustan era of Rome, perhaps, has decoration of the interior of dwellings been carried to a greater excess than the present; nor since the days of the florid style of architecture, has the exterior received more embellishment. Architectural ornaments have been generally copied from the antique; those especially which belong to the orders. There is, indeed, a kind of classical standard which governs the architect in the execution of public edifices, from which he cannot, with propriety, depart. National or regal emblems, whenever suitable, may always be introduced with propriety in public buildings, and in those of a private or mixed character, all legitimate ornaments may be displayed. Of this class, the acanthus, the branches of the olive, and leaves of the palm, the crown of laurel, are all proper when judiciously introduced; and the rose and honeysuckle flowers, and the trefoils and cing-foils, which so often occur in sculpture and plaster work, are also all proper, for the great reason that they are imitations of Nature.

But, in our present style of decorative execution, from the most elaborate finishing of a merchant's palace, down to the pattern of his maid-servant's gown, there is such latitude taken in the display of licentious fancy, that imagination itself is baffled to find anything in the infinite variety of Nature's works, to which the designs can be compared, or to which they bear the most distant resemblance.

It is unaccountable that the whole race of our artisans, the ornamental statuary, paper stainer, cotton printer, &c., should all be straining their low thought to shape unreal forms and figures, and striking out designs the most intricate and complicated, to the almost utter neglect of those numberless simple, though transcendently beautiful configurations which everywhere abound in the works of Nature. This surely is a dereliction of all propriety, an exuberance of grovelling taste which no consideration can excuse, nor reason justify. In this age of refinement, good taste should be the guide in all things where invention is necessary, and design requisite; whatever is grotesque or fantastic should be discarded, and the elegant forms of vegetable and animal nature alone take their place. It is to be presumed that much of this false ornamentation has had its origin in the fear which these pattern-mongers have of criticism, for if

they copied natural objects, everybody could judge of their merits. No one can criticise with much force their indescribable forms and imaginary figures. They are amenable to no known laws of Art. It may be granted, that it is as ridiculous to form stone or plaster flowers, as those geometrical frets and fanciful nothings which we find in modern architectural decoration. But it may be answered, that natural forms are the best, since they have established names, and emblematical significance.

The old-fashioned tapestry was much more rational than the nondescript multifigurations of our modern paper hangings. The tapestry represented some event, told some legendary tale, taught some moral lesson, yielded some information; but in our gaudy and ephemeral—ten thousand times repeated—paper nothings, there is no design to interest, nor combination to amuse the eye, beyond a most casual glance.

All this vitiated taste, or fashion rather, is to be regretted, especially as it appears that the shapeless forms are just as expressive, and difficult of execution, as the most elegant imitation of nature's forms. To the cultivated mind, the violations of taste in these matters that everywhere meet its eye in this city, are extremely painful. It is doubtful if any age or country has produced so much that is reprehensible. That system that consigns to the mere house carpenter the designing of a temple of worship, or the palace of a merchant prince, must be expected to produce such results. It would be difficult to find in New York a structure of any pretension, which does not, both in its internal and external arrangement and decoration, present in every detail the grossest violations of truth and taste. It is not generally so in the continental cities of Europe. There the worst specimens of architecture would rank higher than our best; not in pretension, but in modesty, appropriateness, and justness of proportion and ornamentation.

The most conspicuous fault in our city architecture is, to use a mild term, redundancy. In external decoration, take for instance the lintels of windows, the convoluted flourishes over doorways, and the grand totals of some of the overwhelming cornices of the stores, and some of the up-town private dwellings. What a waste of raw material, what stupid assemblages of forms, what a total disregard to the uses of the architectural member, what concealed affectations of shields, coats of arms, and such like fooleries, and what an unwise jumble of ornamental objects, often so crowded, that the general effect is lost, and so arranged, that neither the laws of grace, light and shade, nor fitness, could have been in the least comprehended by the arranger. Let it not be understood that the carpenters are altogether to blame for all this. Considering their opportunities and pretensions, they achieve greater excellence than the professional architect.

It would be a useful institution, one that could furnish the man about to build, in a few lessons, some of the leading principles of architectural taste. We have often, in half an

hour's conversation, disgusted a man with the errors of his new house, not by pointing out the mistake, but by giving him a few principles. He is then led to understand that the man who loads his house with unmeaning, expensive ornaments, is a robber.

These faulty tastes, however, suit the public taste. They are the admiration of the crowd, and they are a part of our general system of life. The vulgar taste of our women, who deem themselves only well dressed when carrying the greatest variety and most costly fabrics, is but another phase of the architectural faunt of the day, and indeed this is equally true of our household furniture, our carriages, our gardening, and indeed of almost everything else that pertains to the habits of the luxurious New Yorker.

ART NEWS FROM ALBANY.

DEAR CRAYON,—Our usually staid and quiet citizens have lately been worked up to the highest pitch of Art excitement. A fever of the most pictorial character has broken out in our midst; the infection was caught from a number of flaming red and yellow posters, announcing that,

A RARE
AND MOST EXTENSIVE COLLECTION OF
OIL PAINTINGS!!

By the most celebrated of the
EUROPEAN MASTERS!!!

would be exhibited free. After dwelling on the variety, beauty, exquisite finish, and many other never-to-be-sufficiently-appreciated qualities, the posters hinted that the performance would conclude with "a sale of the entire collection."

This was enough. The contagion soon spread, and so rapidly, that ere night every other person you met showed some symptoms of the epidemic; excited parties might be seen darting through the crowds of pedestrians in the street, endangering personal wardrobe by clutching at sleeves of passing acquaintances to ask the all-absorbing question, "Have you seen the pictures?" If they had not seen them, they were advised to do so at once. If they had seen them, they congratulated each other in the most elaborate manner.

The excitement was most intense among the highest class of Art critics and patrons, those whose innate sense of the Beautiful had been cultivated to such an extent that they would not bestow a second glance on such pictures as Ary Scheffer's "Dante," or two minutes' time on Delacroix's "Hemicycle." My young friend Quill seemed to have embarked all his energies in getting everybody to see that superb collection. I saw him endeavoring to persuade an acquaintance to go, but being unsuccessful, he pounced on me, and insisted that I should accompany him. In vain I urged my inability to appreciate. He kindly said that what I did not know he would tell me. We went accordingly, and were ushered in the galleries without having to go through the conventional process of "paying at the door." On entering the room, I was nearly lifted from my feet by the gorgeous array of Chrome Yellow, Dutch Pink, and inspiration, that hung about the walls in every direction. Quill was not so much affected; he had been there several times, and was used to it. He proceeded at once to show me up. "Look at the frames," said he, "did you ever see more chaste frames, to begin with." They were certainly very simple, "pleasing to the eye," and cheap, qualities which cultivated minds never overlook. He would have dwelt longer on their beauties, had we not been drawn to the "gems," of which they were but as set-

tings. The place of honor on the line was filled by a copy (nobly defiant of the original) of Raphael's "Madonna of the Chair." A shameless wretch near me said it was the "Madonna of the Bed-post," referring, no doubt, to the piece of furniture on which the principal figure is seated. We passed on, glad to leave such company. Here Quill left me for a few moments, and I was obliged to go on without his assistance. We, as a nation, should feel highly flattered by the love for American scenery exhibited by the European masters. The astonishing manner in which they stay over there, and paint "views from Nature" in this country, is beyond all praise. Many of the landscapes bore a striking resemblance to some of Bartlett's prints. There were other paintings, too, which looked so like prints after the works of Jos. Vernet, Both, Paul Potter and Cuypp. I thought there must be humbug somewhere. Not in that collection, certainly, for the Israelitish party who owned them, and the down-east-out individual who seemed to be continually brushing them with a feather duster, looked incapable of guile. And then all the papers had said they were so "rare" and "choice," and had called the public attention to the "chiaroscuro" and "perspectives," which qualities they insisted were possessed by each work in the most unlimited quantities, that even the butcher-boys from the market round the corner came in, and at once endorsed the sentiments of the press. Their criticisms were unnecessarily profane in some instances, but generally to the point.

There was almost an entire absence of the Historical or Heroic, but no end to the quality of American scenes, together with a liberal sprinkling of "Swiss Views," depicting unapproachable cottages, nicely balanced on the brink of frightful abysses, handsomely cleaned rocks, with the most vividly blue water tumbling over them, pic-nic parties dancing in wild ecstasy on places where a chamois hunter would have a tough job to stand. And then we had "Marine views," with trees of an unknown species in the foreground; terrific "storms at sea," without the above-mentioned botanical curiosities, but with the most unique, original, and extraordinary specimens of naval architecture, either "riding out gales," or pitching head foremost into brilliantly illuminated light-houses. The mad, angry waves were painted in such a manner, that it was impossible for me to look at them any time without feeling a sensation very much like sea-sickness.

Next came one of those splendid "Winter pieces," only seen in exhibitions of this character. I doubt whether nature can do anything quite as cold. It had many admirers, this icy gem; an attaché of one of our morning papers froze two of his fingers while gratifying his sense of touch; I am sorry that he met with any accident, for it was quite refreshing to see him while thus exhibiting his "fine feeling for color." He did not try to handle any of the fruit, in some of those wonderful Fruit Pieces, after that, although he said that he "felt tempted to go right up and take a hold of them Spitzenberg Apples." Ah! miracles of Art, were those chrome-yellow lemons, and the Prussian-blue plums. And then the grapes! such unflinching severity of outline, such unmistakable spots of high light lavished on each particular grape—perfectly regardless of expense; 'tis well that Lance did not see them, he would have felt his "occupation gone."

We next came to a picture said to be an ancient and honorable relic of antiquity, invested with a delicious air of mystery by being labelled "Artist unknown." Just think of it! who knows but in a few years it may turn out to be a Rembrandt! worth an uncountable fortune? It was a marvel, and could not be richer in tone, or more battered in appearance, if it had played principal shutter to a smoke-

house for the last century. It was at once pronounced a "*chef d'œuvre*" by all our connoisseurs and Art savants. One of our resident artists, in a mean spirit of magnificence, called it trash. Does he think that our citizens, led on by our newspapers, will acknowledge his talent while he is thus insensible to the Genius displayed by this illustrious Unknown Master? No!—never will he be allowed a space again among their æsthetical reviews of half-painted buildings, eating-house signs, and Art sales like the one which now engages our attention.

I felt lost without the promised assistance of "Quill," and am afraid that I have not done justice to this grand pictorial enterprise. One little incident occurred, which, perhaps, is worthy of mention. I observed that quite an excited group had collected around something, which, from the deep interest they seemed to manifest, I thought had just been pronounced the "Gem" of the lot. On coming among them, I found Quill and another connoisseur disputing about a picture before them, representing a large spot of Naples yellow hovering over a "Ruined Tower" (just such a painting as Micawber, in his gloomiest moments, would have delighted in). Quill pronounced it a most decided sun-set, while the other insisted, in rather a noisy style of elocution, that it was a sunrise—they made a wager, and produced a catalogue—the astronomical phenomenon was there named.

"Moonlight . . . (Superb) . . . By Van-der-near."

It was a drawn bet, and the money was returned to the enthusiastic aspirants to art profandy.

The sale was advertised to take place the following evening. Anxious to witness all of that imposing ceremony, I went early. The sale had already begun, and "Winter Pieces" were being "awfully sacrificed," at prices ranging from twenty to sixty dollars. The "Madonna of the Bed-post" was knocked down (to the purchaser, a sneering individual suggested, behind me,) at the "most ruinous" price of one hundred and five dollars. The auctioneer assured us that "Madoonnas have riz since the one owned by Bedini took to winkin." The purchaser of this seemed to be of an experimental turn of mind, and will, no doubt, endeavor to teach the same facetious propensity to his prize: the other works of Art were sacrificed at the same ruinous prices.

I sympathized with the owner of the Gems. Poor man! in this wild frenzy of the moment—in fact, driven nearly frantic at thus seeing his property ruthlessly swept away—he even offered any quantity of "duplicates at the same price!" This produced a heart rending state of things. Merchant princes would see exact copies of what they had purchased to adorn the grand drawing-room—sold, perhaps, for bar-room ornaments, ten dollars cheaper to the keeper of some victualling cellar. Everything was sacrificed! the state of the poor collector's mind may be imagined when I inform you that he has actually advertised "*another sale*," like the ruined gamester who stakes his last cent on the turn of a card, so does he seek to rebuild his shattered fortune by the reckless announcement of "*another sale*." The Press have come forward with all their might, to aid him, and the prospects are, that the works will realize returns commensurate with their worth. Forty odd complimentary notices appeared in no time, soliciting the public to "rally round the old Masters" (this is hardly an artistical figure of speech, but we must remember that election is just over, and the papers haven't had time to drop their political phrases). The Public will, no doubt, "rally" as requested, and convince the gifted collector that Albany is the best place after all to "sell" in.

But what shall we do after he leaves us—must the Art fever die out when we have so many

willing to be victims? Could you not, Dear Crayon, step up Broadway and send us some of those imposing works of Art which you People of Gotham don't seem to appreciate half as much as we do.

Yours truly,

P. GREEN, B. A.

CITY HALL.—The project of a new City Hall in this city has been laid aside for some months, to enable, it is said, the committee to mature a better plan than has been hitherto submitted. It is, however, suspected by many, that there is more anxiety felt about the expenditure of the two millions of dollars, which it is estimated will be its ultimate cost, than as to the artistic perfections of the design or its adaptability to public uses. Several designs were submitted to the committee by men who, it was reported, had been privately advised to do so by parties in power. No general competition was encouraged, and our best architects, generally, declined to have anything to do with the affair, believing that the final choice would be dictated by corrupt motives. It is not our design at this time, to criticise designs which months ago received most general and hearty condemnation. But we understand the project is soon again to come up before the city government, and we desire that every lover of Art should be on the alert, lest some plan should be foisted upon our age that will for ever disgrace it. Every man should be interested in having the public architecture of his time, a representation, at least, of what he knows and feels of the Art. The generation which produced the present City Hall, the finest building in the city, a building which, for symmetry and proportion, cannot be matched by any other on this continent, did itself great credit, and we should feel grateful to it for leaving so fine a memorial. St. Paul's and St. John's churches were built about the same time; buildings which command, and always will command, general admiration. But the generation which is to succeed us, will have occasion to deride our taste in many a costly structure of to-day. Let us do, then, what we can to secure to the city a tolerable City Hall—more we can hardly hope for.

It is not generally known that the present City Hall is mostly made up after the Capitol in Rome, one of the distinguished works of Michael Angelo. The central staircase, which is original, is an object of great admiration of architects. Indeed, the whole building evidences great architectural powers on the part of the designer.

ACADEMY OF MUSIC.

The experiment of reducing the prices at this house has been rewarded by a largely increased attendance. But we fear the change has come too late to redeem the losses of the season. Mdlle. Didiér is gradually winning her way into public favor. Her quiet, but most thoroughly artistic style, is not well calculated to produce a sudden impression upon an American audience. But, in the end, we believe she will find numerous admirers, and become a general favorite. Mme. Lagrange continues to main-

tain her position. She is exceedingly popular. It is not easy to understand how such singers as these, together with Morelli, Arnoldi, and Gasparoni, great artists as they are, and most enthusiastically admired by all who see them, should not always command crowded audiences. They surely deserve it. There have been, doubtless, seasons, when their success would have been brilliant. It is to be feared that the experiences of this season will deprave us for some years the enjoyment of a like opera enterprise, whose *ensemble* has surpassed anything of the kind we have ever before seen in New York.

The Huguenots, it is announced, will soon be produced, with all the resources of the Academy company.

The Exhibition of the Rhode Island Art Association at Providence opens on the 13th inst. From what we can learn concerning the pictures obtained for it, we believe it will have an unusually interesting collection. Among other attractive works are two by Rosa Bonheur. The R. I. Association have purchased a variety of casts for the use of students of Art in Providence, to which will soon be added a number of statues specially imported from Europe. The Art-movement as thus manifested in Providence, is one of the encouraging signs of the times. The energy displayed, and the interest taken in this institution, by those who are concerned with it, are a sure guarantee of its permanent establishment.

W. MASON'S and CARL BERGMANN'S CLASSICAL MATINÉES.—We regret that we were unable to attend the first of these musical entertainments, and report personally on the character of the performances. We are assured, however, by a competent judge, that the entertainment was perfectly satisfactory. Judging by the programme, we do not well see how it could be otherwise. The idea of day-performances is an excellent one, and we hope the success of this effort will lead to others of the same description. The next "Matinée" will be given on Tuesday, December 18th.

PRINCE'S PROTEAN FOUNTAIN PEN.—We have used one of these pens for some days, and with great satisfaction. For a desk-pen this fountain-pen is a nonpareil in the way of convenience, and to take with one upon a short journey it is a positive necessity. Of all the "Yankee-notions" for which patents have been given, this of the fountain-pen is one of the most commendable.

We have to acknowledge receipt of the regular issues of "The North American Quarterly," "Christian Examiner," "Putnam's Magazine," "The Knickerbocker," "Graham's Magazine," and "Household Words."

As further illustration of our remarks upon The Cosmopolitan Art Association, we extract the following from the *Newport Mercury*:

Last year the Cosmopolitan Art Association came into being, had its day, and, as we supposed, was numbered with the things that were; but in this we were mistaken, for the "second

annual catalogue" has made its appearance, and the public is promised a large collection of choice works of art on the most liberal terms. How many members the association numbered last year we have never learned, but as Powers' Greek Slave was held out as the highest prize, and the rate of subscription was low, probably the number was respectable. This year the principle feature appears to be the Genoa Crucifix, and copies, in marble, of Houdon's models of Washington and Franklin, by Powers, with numerous pictures and bronzes.

That the drawing was fairly conducted last year we have never heard the least doubt expressed, and the name of the young lady who was so fortunate as to draw the Greek Slave, was long in type; but with all this fairness we cannot exactly see how really fine works of art can be included in such a collection, excepting, of course, the leading prize, which may in itself be a work of merit. We reason thus. The association offer to every purchaser of a three dollar ticket a copy of one of the leading three dollar magazines and a chance in the distribution. This is called giving the purchasers "the full value of their subscription at the start." The magazines purchased at wholesale cost fifteen cents a number, or one dollar and seventy cents for the year; but allow that the publishers make a further deduction and put each subscription at one and a half dollars each, the same being reserved for the association. Every one who raises a club of ten has an extra ticket for his trouble, and every subscriber who purchases five chances has another thrown in. The papers that do the advertising (gratis) will be presented with any one magazine and two tickets; and probably there are other ways of disposing of tickets in this easy manner.

Now if we are to deduct all these gift tickets and magazines from the proceeds of the tickets that yield each one and a half dollars, and at the same time deduct the necessary expenses attending such an enterprise, what number of paying subscribers will be necessary to insure anything like a respectable collection of works of art for distribution? That works of a high order, with a very few exceptions, have not been purchased, we think apparent. The bronzes appear to be the ordinary French statuettes intended for mantel ornaments, and among the painters' names, there is not one well known to the American public. Bingham and Coleman are the only names we recognize; and the pictures generally appear to be, what no doubt they will prove, French copies of Claude, Jardin, Teniers, and other old masters, whose pictures have been reproduced hundreds and hundreds of times and sent to this country, to supply the auction sales. Such pictures a man of taste would never buy, and should never be looked upon by those who desire to cultivate a taste for the arts.

ARUNDEL SOCIETY.—To any one at all interested in Art, sufficiently so to be possessor of works of Art, we commend the publications of this society as particularly valuable and instructive. There is one feature by itself about them which ought to attract the notice of those who purchase works of Art, and that is, they are *conscientiously* published: the drawings are made *conscientiously*, the engravings are made *conscientiously*, they are sold *conscientiously*, and the pictures and statuary which the society reproduces were sent forth originally into the world by *conscientious* artists. The subscription for one year's publication is but \$5 50. The plan of this society is the only Art Union arrangement we can heartily recommend, being the only one free from evils which, in other instances, undermine the benefits Art Unions were

intended to be to Art and artists. We refer our readers for a list of their publications to a previous notice of the Arundel Society in our issue of August 22, also to the following notice taken from the *Athenæum*:

The riches of the Arundel Society are now visible to the public at Sydenham. The exhibition was inaugurated on Saturday last by a lecture from Mr. Digby Wyatt, who had, considering the season of the year, a numerous audience. The walls of the Court appropriated to the Society are hung with outline tracings from Giotto's frescoes at Padua in three tiers, as nearly as possible in the order of the originals. On a lower line are placed the reduced drawings and engravings executed from them, which afford a good opportunity of comparison. In fair light weather the upper tracings may be well seen, and will obtain many admirers, notwithstanding their baldness and want of completion. In fact, the purity of the outline contrasts strikingly with the rude execution and gratuitously rough backgrounds of the reductions. In these compositions the power of Giotto is especially manifest. Any one acquainted with the traditional treatment of subjects at this period, must perceive the independence and absolute originality of this great painter, particularly in 'The Murder of the Innocents,' 'The Betrayal,' and 'The Resurrection.' Art-students would do well in such cases to adopt a comparative examination. Many of the outlines are truly grand, witness the figures of the two angels seated upon the vacant tomb. The reductions from the Elgin marbles of the Theseus, Iliissus, and a portion of the frieze, show the Society's power and determination to diffuse a knowledge of the finest examples of Art, whilst their universality of taste is displayed in the wonderful series of ivory carvings, copied to perfection in the composition called *facile ivory*. These ivories have been obtained with great care and research from numerous collections both public and private, so as almost to form a complete assemblage of every known example of importance. Many persons unacquainted with this department of Art will be astonished at the beauty, finish, and exquisite ornaments that occur upon them. In one material may thus be seen a complete succession of sculpture in miniature from the best Imperial times of Rome to the beginning of the Renaissance period, when tournaments were rife, and the most popular siege for representation was that of the Castle of Love. Ivory carving stands to sculpture in the same relation that miniature paintings bear to pictures. A useful "descriptive notice" of these various objects, affording particulars and classifications, has been issued by the Council of the Society.

The *London Observer* says:

The sculptural illustrations include the reductions made by Mr. Cheverton of a part of the Elgin marbles, the "Iliissus" and the "Theseus," cast in plaster and in bronze by Messrs. Elkington & Co. There is also an exceedingly valuable collection of casts from ancient ivory carvings, in a material known as "*facile*" ivory. The peculiar value of the collection—which results from the circumstances of its formation, and from its unpretending material, but which renders it more instructive than the richest single collection of original ivories—consists in the completeness and continuity with which it illustrates all the vicissitudes of the sculptural Art, exhibiting its first decline from the exuberance of Roman luxury, to the laborious littleness of Byzantine formalism, its collapse in Western Europe under the overthrow of the imperial civilization, its reviving struggles in the rude hand of Norman vigor, and its eventual emergence in all the grace and spirituality of the best Gothic age.